

Passing Thoughts... Hicks, hacks & hicks

Letters to the Editor by David Kindon 2007-2012

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1 Tony's terrific day out (27 January 2012)

Yesterday we saw the morphing of Australia Day, Invasion Day and the 40th Anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy with the whitefellas' restaurant of choice (adjacent to the embassy) the scene of violent protest and hyper security.

Whatever the rights or wrongs of what happened or why, the picture etched into my mind was the smirking face of Tony Abbott throughout the incident.

Abbott's every move seems calculated to stir up his "middle Australia" or Tony's troglodytes as I call them.

I used to think that Toxic Tony was just an arse. I now realise that he is an arsonist, inflaming every issue which appeals to his tribe.

2 Our National Anthem (19 December 2011)

Can I suggest that if both major parties don't have the moral fortitude to allow onshore processing of asylum seekers, then we change the second verse of our National Anthem?

Currently it says:

*"Beneath our radiant Southern Cross,
We'll toil with hearts and hands,
To make this Commonwealth of ours
Renowned of all the lands,
**For those who've come across the seas
We've boundless plains to share,**
With courage let us all combine
To advance Australia fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia fair."*

Maybe it should read:

**"For those who've come across the seas,
We've heaps of offshore detention centres to share"?**

3 Black Holes discovered (8 December 2011)

Scientists have discovered the two biggest black holes ever observed, each with a mass billions of times greater than the Sun's, according to a study published last week.

The two giants are located in the heart of a pair of galaxies several hundred million light years from Earth, said the study in the scientific journal "Nature".

Each black hole is estimated to have a mass about 10 billion times greater than the sun, dwarfing the previously largest-known black hole, which has a mass of 6.3 billion suns.

Apparently the largest hole has been named "The Eurozone" and the other has been named "The US Economy".

They would swallow the ALP's Beazley Black Hole and the Coalition Costing Black Hole without even a burp.

4 Rubbery Figures (4 December 2011)

Two days before the August 2010 federal election, the Opposition released a report on the costing of its election promises. The one page report (!) which verified the costings was undertaken by a private accounting firm after the Coalition had refused to submit its costing to a "biased" Treasury. When asked about the relevance that could be placed on the one page report, both Mr Hockey and Mr Robb vociferously defended it repeatedly described it as an audit.

"I tell you, it is an audit. This is an audited statement," he said on ABC radio.

Fellow Coalition frontbencher Andrew Robb also strongly vouched for the costings, saying they were "as good as you could get anywhere in the country, including in Treasury".

However in an article in the Age on 1 December this year, columnist Peter Martin asserts that in fact, the document was the result of a carefully worded agreement between the accountants and the Coalition to produce work primarily "not of an audit nature".

You may recall that Treasury, looking at the costings found an \$11 billion double counting error. So what you might ask? Well someone complained and an Inquiry was conducted by the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

A professional conduct tribunal ruled that the accountants were liable to face disciplinary action because their report failed to contain "a statement that the procedures performed do not constitute either an audit or a review" and so failed to properly describe the limited nature of the agreed-upon procedures.

Asked about the tribunal ruling, Mr Hockey said it was a matter between the institute and the two accountants. Asked whether he had been wise to call their work an audit, he said: "I'm not getting into it, mate."

Oh what a tangled web we weave...

5 Fear and Loathing (21 November 2011)

What frightens an affluent western society? What drives us to become so insular and lacking in compassion? Are fear and loathing two sides of the same coin called racism? Why is that the better off we become the less happy we are? The more we acquire the more fearful we become of losing it. We are uncertain about the future - we are afraid of the unknown.

The more we hang on to what we've got the more selfish we become and the higher we build the barriers between "us" and "them". We are happy to consume the cheap imported products manufactured in the sweat shops of Asia - but we don't want to be confronted by the reality of their lives. After all, we are hard working and they are primitive and lazy, we hold moral and intellectual superiority over them - we are born to rule.

Hmmm.

6 Christian hyperbole - Biblical rhetoric (14 November 2011)

The passage through the Senate of the Carbon pricing legislation was accompanied by relief in the Government, tree hugging by the Greens and confected outrage by the Coalition.

Senator Ron Boswell exuding more than anyone's fair share of toxic fumes labelled Tony Windsor's support for the Bills as the worst betrayal since Judas Iscariot accepted his 30 pieces of silver from Pontius Pilate!

George Brandis predicted the Government would wear the consequences of the legislation like a "crown of thorns".

On the positive side - at least no one has been crucified yet!

Those Christians - again!!

7 Toxic, Invisible, Weightless Policies (30 October 2011)

Some time ago, Mr Abbott ridiculed a carbon tax as being applied to a colourless, invisible, odourless, weightless gas (good news to businesses expected to be paying a tax of \$23 per tonne of CO2 emissions). The qualities of CO2 now seem to be equally applicable to the Coalition's invisible, colourless, weightless policy agenda.

The first term of an Abbott will be incredibly busy. Busy rescinding legislation enacted under the Gillard Government.

I presume that first up will be the unwinding of the Carbon Price Legislation - all 16 Acts. Each unwinding will require a replacement Act. But as usual the devil will be in the detail. Removing the tax, removing the Authorities set up to administer it. Removing the industry assistance that goes with the tax. Taking away the tax cuts and concessions to families businesses and pensioners. He hopes the ALP will support his actions - what planet is he from?

He will also end the waste - any remnants of the economic stimulus will be grabbed back into general revenue and massive cuts in public expenditure - on Government programs and public service employment, will be made to fill the inevitable black hole.

He's going to stop the boats - either turning them around at sea or packing them off to Nauru even though he will need to introduce the Gillard Legislation to achieve that.

He is going to dismantle the NBN - dig it up?

The mining tax will be repealed shovelling billions of dollars into the pockets of overseas based mining conglomerates.

And now he tells us he will rescind the Poker Machine legislation aimed at helping problem gamblers.

It must be great to be an alternative government whose first term will be spent assiduously undoing all the good work of the previous government, with no need for any policies of his own.

8 The Protest Season (21 October 2011)

Just as Afghanistan has its "fighting season" the rest of the world seems to be locked into a "protest season". In Europe we have witnessed protests in Greece and Italy based on the harsh economic measures being proposed to curb their profligacy. In the UK we saw riots, vandalism and hooliganism based on opportunistic violence and mayhem. In the US we have seen the rise of "Wall St" protests against the profligacy of the finance sector and the imposition of corrective measures on the population at large. The "Wall St" protests have spread quickly around the globe with our own version in Martin Place in Sydney.

We have also witnessed the misogynistic protests of Tony's Troglodytes against Julia Gillard.

Now those opposed to Coal Seam Gas extraction - once again whipped up by Alan Jones - are making their voices heard.

Finally the poor buggers in the Arab world are protesting against their Governments in an attempt to become more like us!!

Funny ol' world init?

9 The Flying Wedge - Smokes, Booze, Pokies (14 October 2011)

Isn't it neat how bad things happen in threes? It must have something to do with the Bermuda Triangle - or maybe we have our own "unAustralian" triangle.

The tobacco industry is now on everyone's blacklist and are fighting a rear-guard action against plain packaging legislation which has now passed through the House of Reps. Let's not forget that it is not all that long ago that the NRL competition was called The Winfield Cup and cigarette advertising supported the Formula One circuit and many other sporting events. Recent smoking prohibitions incurred the wrath of Clubs and Hotels who immediately established outdoor areas where the smokers could not only maintain their habit - but play the pokies as well - hey segue! but not just yet!

Last year we witnessed the Chicken Little predictions of the booze industry over the alcopops tax - forecasting an increase in the sale of straight spirits. This did not happen.

Now it's "unAustralian" to help poker machine addicts. The Clubs, backed by the NRL (but not the AFL), have initiated a loud, vociferous campaign against proposed poker machine legislation designed to address the issue of poker machine addiction. A campaign carrying a slogan, which could only have been cobbled together by someone like John Singleton, is that it is "Un-Australian" to support the Wilkie proposals.

The Clubs are twisting the plan and exaggerating the results. Once more - can it be said often enough - First Simplify - Then Exaggerate - Then repeat ad nauseam?

Like any good yarn, the plot thickened the other weekend with the disclosure by the Brisbane Sunday Mail of two documents prepared by Clubs Queensland providing a [strategy plan](#) on dealing with these issues as well as a [media manual](#) for use by individual clubs. One interesting proposal was the suggestion that mobile ATMs be positioned outside the premises to overcome the withdrawal limit proposed by Wilkie.

The strategy document shows that the Clubs' Australia claims of reduced income were inflated. The PowerPoint presentation shows that the impact of the Wilkie "heavy" option is a reduction in gambling revenue of 10-20% not the 40% claimed by CA. It even discloses their fall-back position of the Wilkie "Light" option - not a good negotiating tactic to declare Plan B!!

10 Human Fallibility (6 October 2011)

Given the constant diet of bad news and the bombardment of our senses by vested interests, how do these impact on the way we think, the way we live, the way we interact?

We have certainly seen the scab of intolerance opened up in a way I could have never imagined. I have even discovered an Australian website called "Tolerance is our Demise" - does this suggest that intolerance is our salvation? It demonstrates to me that civil

society is only skin deep and that beneath that skin run some very nasty emotions. We are happy to send aid overseas (but not too much mind) so long as the unfortunates stay where they are and don't interrupt our comfortable lives.

When the poor buggers do get here - we chuck them in mandatory detention (hey - is there an optional detention?), then try to offload them onto some other country for processing. So our intolerance merges with our xenophobia and we see the ugly sliver of racism right there before us.

While we have been slumped on the couch an insidious disease has been taking hold. **Technology has made us stupid.** Everything is available at our finger tips - home entertainment, delivered junk food, pornography, on-line shopping.

In the process we have become fat and unfit. No one really knows how or why something works these days - we don't see this as relevant. Parents have led the way by example - now parental control has disappeared down the gurgler and results in the sort of behaviour we saw on the streets of the UK recently. A completely dysfunctional generation.

So there we have it, a self-centred, frightened, hateful, disrespectful growing group in society egged on by politicians with no principles and media megaphones. Solutions? Sorry haven't come across any yet but I'm on the case.

11 Addiction to growth (1 October 2011)

I have come to the not-too-amazing conclusion that the human race is addicted to Growth. I also believe that this lies at the base of all our problems and will eventually see a rapid decline in living standards and place in doubt the future ability of the human race to survive.

Firstly, the world population is growing at an unsustainable rate. There are around 7 billion living people and we are looking at 9 to 10 billion within the next couple of decades. To meet the demands of a soaring population, we are locked into growth - growth in production and growth in consumption.

In western industrialised countries growth is seen as an absolute necessity and is the mark of a successful economy. When growth falters measures are put in place to stimulate it.

Emerging giants aiming to bring their population to the standards enjoyed in the west are exacerbating the problem. As over 2 billion people in China and India look to raising living standards the output to achieve this will result in a more rapid depletion of already diminishing resources along with an acceleration in climate pollution.

If root cause analysis were applied to these problems - then the clear candidate - the human elephant in the room - is the need to halt and reverse population growth. However this would impact on future production and consumption and would be a difficult political argument to win. But to ignore it is equally perilous.

12 Refugees - bipartisan hypocrisy (23 September 2011)

The plight of would-be-refugees fleeing to Australia goes from bad to worse as Government and Opposition seek to out-muscle each other in coming down hard on asylum seekers whilst dressing their rhetoric in the language of fake humanitarian concern.

Tony Abbott must have had another audience with Cardinal Pell because he is now describing the Government's attempts to achieve what the Opposition wants - guaranteed offshore processing - as removing the human rights of would be refugees.

Offshore processing - onshore processing - it sounds like the live beef exports trade.

What disgusting hypocrisy from those who claim to be committed Christians yet have not an ounce of compassion in their bones.

Given the recent appeal to the High Court - it would seem inevitable that any new Legislation will be tested by refugee advocates and with some chance of success - especially where the rights of unaccompanied minors are concerned.

By refusing to join with the Government in legislating for off-shore processing, because they are stuck on the Nauru solution (what a load of guano), Abbott might accidentally provide the right solution.

The right solution is on-shore processing and if it is 600 per month - then so be it. Our intake is miniscule compared to European countries where the debate hardly raises a ripple.

The nutcase minority "Tolerance is our Demise" need to be shoe-horned back into their foetid little shells.

13 Tony's Troglodytes (7 September 2011)

I had a moment of synchronicity when I read Dr Jaffrey's letter in the News Weekly (7 September). I attended the Convoy Rally in Canberra two weeks ago cunningly disguised as one of Tony's Troglodytes complete with false buck teeth.

I was abused by the crowd, specially one oaf holding a sign which said "Sack the Crack".

I yelled at Alan Jones and denounced him as a liar.

However afterwards, when writing my eNewsletter "Advocacy Update" I said "Some of the people I have seen attending the "Middle Australia" rallies would make the good burghers of Salem Massachusetts look innocent". On reflection those at the rally wouldn't have even known what I was on about!!

Congratulations on taking a stand Jacqui.

14 Spot the Dog (7 September 2011)

I often walk along Main Beach here at Merimbula. It's beautiful and quiet during the off-season - just a few locals and their dogs (why are they all Maltese Terriers?).

Last week I saw a large young frisky Dalmatian dog at the beach. The owner let it off the leash and off it went. Bounding down the beach, trying to run in all directions at once. Down to the water's edge - barking at the waves, then along the beach stopping to examine every piece of flotsam and jetsam. Then it scampered up to the dunes running along the line of the undergrowth, sniffing here and there and cocking its leg here and there. Then bounding back to circle its owner before heading off again down the beach.

Eventually its exercise resulted in an urgent poo on top of the sand. Its owners pretended not to know what the dog was doing and so absolved themselves of any responsibility.

The poor bathers who wore the sand kicked up as the pooch passed or the salt water shaken off its body were not so impressed.

I asked myself what was the difference between the Dalmatian and Tony Abbott and the only thing I could come up with is that Abbott seems able to change his spots.

15 Our conscience - the High Court (5 September 2011)

The two major political groups in Australia have what amounts to a harsh bipartisan approach to the issue of asylum seekers. Keep the bastards out. The so-called committed Christians seem to be leading the charge.

Firstly we have "Mandatory Detention" (has it ever been optional?). Next we have "Offshore Processing" which entails paying others to do our dirty work. Offshore Processing you will note is also applied to live cattle exports. Beautiful labels aren't they?

Now, as the Parties' delusions have been shattered by the High Court we might see another term to describe the plight of would-be refugees - "Mandatory Compassion" - and about time too!

16 Send in the Clowns (26 August 2011)

Is anyone else irritated by the tendency for everyone on television trying to be "funny" and "clever" - often at the same time?

Weather forecasters have been at it for years - and seem to regard themselves as "celebrities". The same applies to sports reporters, financial analysts and even political commentators.

The practice seems to escalate when journalists chat with other journalists on air. Breakfast announcers have long seen themselves as clowns - which mostly they are.

I feel it is a form of self effacing embarrassment which forces these people to dress up the facts with irrelevant and often inappropriate smug commentary.

I get the same feeling of revulsion I used to experience walking past a "Clint's Crazy Bargains" store. But then again that is probably my own problem.

No wonder we get the crackpots showing up at rallies with increasing confidence when they are fed on a diet of media pap all the time.

17 Bi-coastal Tony (19 August 2011)

Bi-coastal Tony speaks with forked tongue. On the east coast he spruiks the interests of miners over farmers. In the west he reverses this position saying farmers should be able to prevent coal seam gas exploration on productive farmland. Next day he returns to his earlier position.

The term "speaks with a forked tongue" is used to describe hypocritical or duplicitous language and seems appropriate in this instance. His west coast announcement was from a printed speech - which Mr Abbott has assured us means that we can assume he is telling the truth. However, once out of the venue, he refused to acknowledge anything to do with the speech and was strangely and painfully silent.

I thought the whole incident was fracking embarrassing.

Once back on the east coast, Tony's troglodytes returned for a protest rally in Canberra - and today plan to gridlock Canberra with vehicles. The old signs had returned, "Ditch the Witch", Barnaby Joyce rehearsing for a future as a boxing tent barker and Angry Anderson calling for people to "Maintain the rage". What a wonderful level of political debate we have in this country.

18 Outrage Mongering (3 August 2011)

This excellent term was used recently in "Counterpoint" on ABC Radio National to describe the descent from real public debate towards a free-floating desire in Britain to discover scandals and corrupt behaviour. The speaker, Frank Furedi, claims that this impulse has become the defining feature of public life. He believes it is an impulse to be outraged by outrage itself.

This phenomenon plays out at dinner tables around Britain where conversation moves to the latest outrage - say News Limited - rather than discussion of the problems facing the Euro, public sector job cuts, Syria or climate change.

Furedi claims that outrage is really a focus on shallow views but expressed extremely strongly. In Australia, the Counterpoint team described the Australian version as "*venting and voiding*". Phew - get the fire hoses out!

Furedi despairs that all the very real problems confronting mankind are swept aside in an obsession with people's character, hidden motives, ulterior agendas and the story behind the story. Speculation trumps knowledge. Intuition trumps facts.

This mindset may lead us to believe that corrupt, malevolent practice is the default position. Part of the problem lies in what Furedi sees as the "*promiscuous use of language*". This is characterised by the overuse of terms such as "evil", "malevolent" and the labelling of people by the media. Do we really see Voldemort at every turn?

These forces are leading to a "*powerful mood of cultural dissonance in British society*".

How depressingly familiar is this story?

Confected outrage is practically all we are dealt by our political representatives and the shallow gene pool of the media. I just hope the people with Furedi's insight are able to raise our awareness - rather than simply settling into the parallel universe where scandals are the norm.

19 A fraction too much fiction (28 July 2011)

Australians have an engaging knack of calling someone by the opposite of what they are or look like. "Bluey" for a red-headed man (until recently usurped by "Ranga"), "Shorty" for a tall person, "Slim" for a fat person and of course Honest John for John Howard.

I think that after 12 months in the saddle Tony Abbott has earned the moniker of "Truthful Tony".

In a memorable 7.30 Report interview by Kerry O'Brien, he almost succeeded in making a virtue out of lying. In the interview he admitted to sometimes straying from the truth "under pressure" in open debate but that if he was reading from a prepared script you could assume he was telling the truth!

This was some time ago and I think we should be reminded of his predilection from time to time. His Party and the bent media even gilded his admission by saying that the fact that he admitted to not telling the truth was refreshingly honest!!

He reminds me of the elementary particle in quantum physics - whenever it is observed , it shifts position in an unpredictable manner.

20 Toxic Tony's Truculent Troglodytes (21 July 2011)

The electorate is becoming truculent - aggressively hostile, belligerent - stoked by the fires of xenophobia, racism, fear and bigotry opportunistically broadcast by an amoral polity and a compliant media.

A few weeks ago we saw the ugly face of intolerance - waving the placards "Ditch the Bitch", "Ditch the Witch", "Juliar". Standing before the ugly crowd we saw the cream of the Opposition - Abbott, Morrison, Bronwyn Bishop, Mirabella and of course the perennially apoplectic Barnaby Joyce.

The crowd comprised "Middle Australia" according to Toxic Tony. A troglodyte is a person of degraded, primitive or brutal character - unacquainted with the affairs of the world. Tony's mob seemed to fit the troglodyte label perfectly.

Tony's talk of unleashing a revolt seems to be working. Well at least we can see that they are revolting!

Now we hear at a public meeting in Queensland of a man standing up and saying that soon the people will be taking up arms against the Government - that even shocked Joe Hockey.

I hope the Liberal Party still holds standards of decency and that they get rid of this turbulent leader as soon as possible.

21 A faction too much friction (11 July 2011)

We all assume, rightly in my opinion, that Labor's factions are a sea anchor on the Party's ability to be progressive.

What is not generally realised however is that factions also exist within the Coalition.

The most obvious faction is the National Party, taking up the cudgel of **Agrarian Socialists**. Free competition except when it doesn't suit them. Barnaby Joyce a clear winner here.

There are at least three factions within the Liberal Party.

First we have the **Dries** - right wing, free market, laissez faire - who are in the ascendancy in the Abbott led Opposition - people like Eric Abetz. At the other end of the spectrum are the **Wets** who hold softer views about social values - closer to the traditional Labor mould, Malcolm Turnbull being the prime example..

Then of course there are in the middle those who are uncertain about their views or who are in the process of moving to one end of the spectrum or the other. These I call the **Rising Damps**.

I suppose there could also be those who like Kevin Rudd and John Button before him. Button once described himself to me as being in the Non-faction Faction

22 More Silliness (25 June 2011)

The Roman Candle that was Abbott's proposal for a plebiscite on a carbon tax is one of the strangest ideas to emanate from his office. Apparently, as with other oddball ideas, it was not canvassed with his Shadow Cabinet and you could sense the fuming and embarrassment in their ranks as their Leader stumbled on like Don Quixote looking for the next windmill to slay.

The Roman Candle landed with a splutter as it became apparent that even Senator Fielding saw it as a political stunt. Probably the best decision Fielding has made in his unremarkable time in the Senate.

But wait, there's more! When asked whether the Coalition would vote for a carbon tax if the Plebiscite supported the idea - Abbott said "No" they would still oppose it. An \$80 million exercise in utter futility - making the Government's plan to launch a carbon tax advertising campaign costing \$12 million if legislation is passed look like pocket money.

23 Lowest Common Denominator (19 June 2011)

Even though an election may be 18 months away, I have the feeling that the Gillard Government is stumbling round like the Black Knight in Monty Python's Holy Grail. Legs and arms missing but challenging to take on all comers as the life blood drains away.

Meanwhile Tony Abbott has discovered an unbeatable strategy on any political issue you could name. His strategy is to adopt all possible positions simultaneously and toss them out like chunks of meat for the media hounds to prey on.

These situations the major parties find themselves in makes the Independents and Greens look like pious purist monks given to making profound pronouncements which nobody will listen to. The electorate seems to have chosen the Coalition's dark side of the street where, behind economic and "liberal" values we can all aspire to the lowest common denominator, whether it is climate change, refugees, gambling, booze, smoking or other "worthy" causes.

"Keep them out", "No new taxes", "Climate change is all crap", "Bugger animal welfare" seem to sum up what Abbott's conservatives have on offer. Under cover of this dark and smelly blanket our baser instincts flourish. Again to all the "committed" Christians on all sides of Parliament - I would ask them "What would Jesus say of your policies and actions?"

I have given the ALP away (but no one wants them!!) and have become resigned to a return to the "born-to-rule" parties being returned - and indeed think it would be best were this to happen sooner rather than run a full term. BUT NOT WITH ABBOTT at the helm!

24 Abbott's Carbon Sutra (10 June 2011)

Reading Mr Abbott's statements on climate change, ETS and carbon tax over the last two years, it is difficult to know whether they are a catalogue of a confused mind or a school of red herrings designed to bemuse and confuse, I would put my money on the latter.

It's amazing how he gets away with it. Read on...

"We can't conclusively say whether man-made carbon dioxide emissions are contributing to climate change." (Speech 27/07/2009)

"I am, as you know, hugely unconvinced by the so-called settled science on climate change." (27/7/2009)

"It seems that, notwithstanding the dramatic increases in man made CO2 emissions over the last decade, the world's warming has stopped."

"I think the science behind the policy is contentious to say the least." (4/8/2009)

Abbott disputes that humans are responsible for climate change. Asked by the ABC's Four Corners if he still disputed that humans are responsible for climate change, Mr Abbott said:

"Sure, but that's not really relevant at the moment." (17/8/2010)

"I have pointed out in the past that there was that high year a few years ago, and ... if you believe the various measuring organisations, [the temperature] hasn't increased, but again the point is not the science, the point is how should government respond and we have a credible response that will achieve a 5 per cent reduction by 2020 and the government doesn't." (17/8/2010)

"The argument [on climate change] is absolute crap." (12/12/2009)

On the first day of the election campaign Abbott said he opposed a price on carbon.

"I do not support... making consumers pay a price on carbon." (18/7/2010)

But he changed his mind just 24 hours later. "If the world does, obviously that is a new situation and we would have to adjust to it." (20/7/2010)

First he supported an ETS.

"The Howard Government (in 2007) proposed an emissions trading scheme because this seemed the best way to obtain the highest emission reduction at the lowest cost." (Battlelines 2009)

Then opposed an ETS.

"This is not the time to take this risk." (17/3/2009)

Then again supported an ETS.

"We must vote for ETS" (24/7/2009)

"There is much to be said for an emissions trading scheme. It was, after all, the mechanism for emission reduction ultimately chosen by the Howard government." (27/7/2009)

"I think that the science is far from settled but on the insurance principle you are prepared to take reasonable precautions against significant potential risks, and that's I think why it makes sense to have an ETS," (4/10/2009)

"If the Government substantially accepts our amendments there is no reason why this legislation can't be passed." (11/11/2009)

Now again Abbott opposes it and even says climate change is "absolute crap".

Abbott said Opposition would vote against ETS legislation in Senate if decision not delayed. (1/12/2009)

Former Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull's comments on Tony Abbott's position "Tony himself has, in just four or five months, publicly advocated the blocking of the ETS, the passing of the ETS, the amending of the ETS and, if the amendments were satisfactory, passing it, and now the blocking of it."

"We have an Opposition whose current leadership dismisses the Howard Government's ETS policy as being just a political ploy. We have an Opposition Leader who has in the space of a few months held every possible position on the issue, each one contradicting the position he expressed earlier." (7/12/2009)

Phew! Enough positions to get a crick in the back!

25 Political pornography (20 May 2011)

Most of us are observers of the political process. We are not participants except when we drag ourselves off reluctantly to the polling booth. However, our observation has a voyeuristic quality to it,

The Merriam Webster Dictionary gives one definition of pornography as "*The depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intensive emotional response*".

And so, as observers of the political process we watch secretly as the purveyors of political porn ply their insidious trade - reporting sensationally and arousing our emotions. They, the amoral media are the pornographers - we are their victims.

So far the pornographers are winning. We are becoming political porn addicts characterised by obsessive viewing, reading, listening and thinking about it to the detriment of other areas of life.

Yes I raise my hand and admit to being a victim - but most of us are in one sense or another. I believe it's time to nail the pornographers at the rotten core of our media.

26 The morning after the night before (11 May 2011)

... and so another federal budget has come and gone. Now we have the media vultures, jackals and maggots picking over its carcass. By tearing it into small strips for public consumption, the media is able to pick a bone with every mouthful. I watched the budget last night unlike most of the media who had been in the lock-up and were feverishly sharpening their claws in readiness for the ritual post budget slaughter.

By tearing it into shreds it becomes difficult to see the budget in its entirety. It also gives a smorgasbord of juicy points of attack. Listening to the various analyses you would think that we had each witnessed a different budget speech! Even where interviewees praised initiatives such as the mental health program, the interviewer I saw on Sky News looked aggrieved and said "but surely the Government wouldn't have done this without your lobbying".

Oh dear, I feel another bout of media malaise sweeping over me. Mr Rabbit in one interview said there were some good things about the budget. He was soon brought into line, this morning he described it as a complete dud aimed at hurting working families!!

I have come to the conclusion that Abbott's Christianity (and other "committed" Christians in Parliament) allows him to say whatever he wants and in an inflammatory manner in the certain knowledge that tomorrow he can say sorry to the electorate and confess his sins to his god. How convenient.

27 Topsy Turvy Tony (6 May 2011)

What a strange political world we live in!

A year ago, we saw the toppling of Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister and Malcolm Turnbull as Leader of the Opposition. They were replaced by Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott respectively. Now, according to the opinion polls, neither PM nor Opposition Leader can claim to have the support of the public. But what is fascinating is that the very two who were ousted are now clear favourites as "preferred" leaders of their respective parties!!

Even stranger - apparently their support is coming from voters in opposing parties!! This gives some comfort to those of us who would rather have a boil up the bum than have Abbott as Prime Minister.

28 The Royal Family - our German Heritage (26/04/11)

Mountbatten-Windsor is the personal surname of some of the descendants of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh under an ambiguously-worded Order-in-Council issued in 1960, and as such a cadet branch of the House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg (known as the House of Glücksburg for short), which in turn is a branch of the House of Oldenburg.

It differs from the official name of the British Royal Family or Royal House, which remains Windsor. The adoption of the Mountbatten-Windsor surname does not apply to members of the Royal Family who are not descended from The Queen (her cousins, for example, and the descendants of the late Princess Margaret). The Order specifically applies the surname to those descendants of the Queen not holding Royal styles and titles but it has been applied to or informally used by members of the Royal Family descended from Queen Elizabeth II as their surname, as shown at the marriages of the Duke of York and the Princess Royal, both having been registered with Mountbatten-Windsor in their entries in the marriage registers.

The Mountbatten surname derives from the German town of Battenberg, in Hesse. Prince Louis of Battenberg changed his surname to Mountbatten (its literal English translation) during the First World War at the request of King George V. When then-Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark, a member of the House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg (the royal house of Denmark and Norway and the deposed royal house of Greece) took British citizenship, he used this surname since he descends from the Battenberg family through his mother, Princess Alice of Battenberg.

The name Windsor was adopted by the British branch of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1917.

Achtung!

29 2. Burka Bunkum (27/04/11)

Aren't we a funny lot when it comes to religious intolerance. The Burka has been banned in France and is under threat in other western countries. It's a hideous garment which subjugates women and effectively removes their identity.

In my opinion if people want to wear degrading clothing then let them. In this I include Nuns, motor cycle helmets, Judges wigs, Bishop's Mitres, mass tattoos and the ubiquitous hoodie.

When it comes to threatening behaviour and associated clothing - I would vote to ban the hoodie anyway!

30 Tony - the Opposition's Soapie Star (18/04/11)

In an episode of "The Vicar of Dibley", Dawn French relates to her Verger the tale of two Nuns in the bath tub. One says to the other "Where's the soap?". The other replies "Yes it does doesn't it"

With Parliament in recess until Budget Night in May, Tony Abbott strikes me as being as slippery as a bar of soap. First he accuses the government of not having the ticker to make the big cuts necessary in the coming Budget. Then when the Government starts talking about massive budget cuts, slippery Tony tells us that the cuts wouldn't be necessary if the Government hadn't spent so much!

Abbott seems to have decided to be an OPPOSITION Leader, opposing everything regardless of the issue. This seems to be popular with his right wing coalition colleagues. He is establishing a well-earned reputation as a ferocious leader and this in turn is egging on the "One Notion" elements of his Shadow Cabinet and backbenchers to show their true plumage.

To me, it seems that the "better" he performs as this type of Opposition Leader, the less he looks like the alternative Prime minister. By being so slippery he might end up going down the gurgler and leaving his colleagues in a lather.

31 Rancid Jocks (11/04/11)

When I joined the Navy as a Midshipman several lifetimes ago we were all issued with jockstraps. This garment - to be worn under sporting gear - had a strangely medieval air about it as if it had been spawned by the cod-piece. With the family jewels packed into a frontal pouch, the rear end hung out as it were, held in place by two narrow straps. I presume it was designed by a mad Scotsman (Jock?). who wanted to wear at something underneath his kilt.

It was a figure of fun and much amusement. Unfortunately it was also one of those garments that rarely saw the inside of a washing machine. A jockstrap after ten footie matches is not a pretty sight.

This brings me to the subject of my letter this week. Why do Australians tolerate, slavishly faun over "shock jocks"? Even Politicians find it necessary to kneel before them and take their punishment!

Jocks seem to be on the payroll of the conservative forces in Australia and remind me of arsonists looking to start bushfires.

For my own purposes I define a "Jock" as someone, male or female, print or electronic media, who directly or by subterfuge, attempts to inflame public opinion from a right wing perspective fostering mistrust, anger, racism, bigotry and hatred.

We all know who they are - News Limited seems to have a very fine stable of fillies and geldings practising the rancid art. I don't propose to name them here - giving them air just stokes their flames. Better to put a lid on them until the fire goes out. Perhaps an even better solution, like my rancid jocks of old, is to consign them to the cesspit of history.

32 The Bland leading the blind (3/04/11)

It was amusingly predictable to hear incoming NSW Premier Mr Barry (Bumper) O'Farrell being shaken (but not stirred) by the revelation that the state's finances are in diabolical shape.

I'm afraid I had a Sergeant Major SHUTUP moment (for those who remember the series It ain't half hot mum)

Oh Dear.
How sad,
Never mind!

33 One Notion Party (24/03/11)

The attendance of senior Coalition members at yesterday's rally in front of federal parliament was no doubt a positive for the Labor Party. I imagine Bumper O'Farrell was gnashing his gums at the free kick tony Abbott gave to his opponents. Mr Abbott claimed

that the rally attendees were "a representative component of middle Australia". Let's hope he was wrong!

Standing in front of a banner with the message "Juliar - Bob Brown's Bitch" he along with Abetz, Joyce, Bishop and Mirabella, seemed quite happy with the crowd's sentiments. Indeed the shot of Barnaby Joyce, veins standing out and foaming at the mouth addressing the crowd reminded me of a dog that needed to be muzzled. Bronwyn Bishop, implacable as ever looked like a small Easter Island statue. Eric Abetz looked as if he were taken back to rallies attended by his forbears.

And then to top it all off, the incoherent rednecks, including many Christian groups (why are Christians so intolerant?) we saw a vision of Pauline Hanson wafting through the crowd. Then it struck me - no it wasn't the One Nation Party protesting but they were being baited and fed by the One Nation Party - Government at any cost - led by an Abbott.

Perhaps most interesting was the absence of the more balanced members of the opposition - Turnbull, Hockey, Pyne etc.

34 Disney and Royalty Characters (20/03/11)

Some years ago on a visit to Disneyland with my family I became convinced that Americans actually live in a fantasy life of which Disneyland is but one component. As you amble round the various "worlds" in Disneyland, you meet the characters from the many Disney cartoons. Characters such as Goofy, Donald Duck, Chipmunks, Pluto et al wander round the park signing "autographs" and posing for family photographs. The characters are inhabited by local college students who have passed behavioural tests - such as no familiarity with the punters.

The more "popular" the character, the more is the demand for autographs and poses. Those lucky enough to make it to the front of the queue may get a "Best wishes David - from Daffy Duck" on their Disneyland map. Of course, the most popular character in the park is Mickey Mouse. He emerges only rarely and is immediately surrounded by a host of jostling acolytes wanting his autograph. Believe me there are far better things to do at Disneyland than to queue for over an hour for Mickey's signature. My view of Americans was confirmed when I saw a rather large guy wobbling at high speed back to his family waving his autograph book shouting "Honey, I got Mickey's autograph!". The fact that this was a college student writing the words seemed to be the fantasy rather than the reality of Mickey!

I was reminded of this incident today when I saw the reports of Prince William's visit to North Queensland (perhaps an aptly named State). The US has Disney, the UK has Royalty. Both are wonderful examples of fantasy getting in the way of reality. The royal family has at least as many "characters" as does Disney and they are wheeled out into the park as the occasion demands. This time it is Prince William's turn to smooth the ruffled feathers of antipodean subjects. Listening to some of the comments of people - mainly women - swooning in his wake must be very reassuring to royalists. "I've never met a real Prince before" reminded me of the Mickey Mouse comment. "He's made time in his busy schedule to come all this way to meet us" was another one. One gushing TV commentator referred to William as "our future King". 11

Spare me!

35 Tribal Behaviour (27/03/11)

Before we evolved into nation states and the accompanying notion of "civil society" the human race existed as tribes. This week, in Libya, we were reminded that in the Arab world, tribes still exist as power bases. Of course they also still exist in remote areas where civilisation has not yet made its mark. The Amazon jungle, parts of Africa and PNG come to mind where the indigenous people still form themselves into tribes.

Today however, the view of tribal behaviour by experts is that it is a pernicious way of achieving group cohesion. Tribalism is said to lead tribe members to despise, or even hate other groups.

Of course, like other aspects of modern human behaviour, civilisation is only skin deep and only a scratch away from chaos.

In recent studies undertaken in the USA - throwing together groups of people who had not met before engendered the formation of tribal groups within the whole population. This behaviour soon dissolved into antagonistic behaviour between the "tribes" leading to one group regarding the other as inferior.

Carn the Pies, Cats, Bombers, et al!!

36 Pythonesque Climate Change Sceptics (10/03/11)

I don't propose to extend commentary and responses to my letters here except to say one writer supported my theory that there are two types of people in the world - those who divide the world into two types and those who don't!

Let's hope the plethora of recent natural disasters have ended and that we now have a reasonable period of recovery and reconstruction. Indeed, let's even concur that the disasters were not acts of god. Taking god out of the equation we seem to be left with a few possibilities - cruelty of nature, normal cyclic weather patterns, completely random events or changes in world weather patterns (climate change?). Are we heading towards a new ice age? Is the earth warming? Are the sea levels rising? Does anyone care? Try to imagine what your great great grandchildren might be saying about you in 100 years time.

Well I guess we can chat and argue over a beer or latte forever - but let me pose a question. Do you insure your house, contents, car, yourself? Then why do we not take out insurance on the planet by taking action now - even if it proves to have been unnecessary. Indeed one symptom of effective action is the accusation that the positive result proves it was unnecessary! Y2K has a lot to answer for.

The sceptics (are they for real?) remind me of the Black Knight in Monty Python's "Search for the Holy Grail". The Knight tried to stop the crusaders from passing and was systematically butchered by the King in combat. As the crusaders continue on their way the Black Knight, on his stumps and with both arms missing challenges them to "Come back and fight you Cowards". I envision the sceptics will still be saying it's all natural as the seas invade their beach side homes with only their noses poking out of the water.

Mind you - some of the sceptics I have witnessed could probably keep talking underwater.

37 Mass Media Hysteria (3/02/11)

Today's journalists belong to a union called "The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance". This broadening of the membership base seems to have allowed a leakage away from journalism into the entertainment sphere. No longer do journalists feel it necessary to report the facts without bias. Their reporting has to be done with flair and accompanied by emotion. Interviews with public figures become gladiatorial as the journalist tries to cut down the interviewee to size whilst the person being interviewed becomes skilled in saying nothing as a defence against accusatory interviewing. If the target is a mere mortal who has suffered some tragedy, the interview is never complete until the journalist strikes tears.

The nightly (and morning) news in most media contain stories which are clearly not news - for instance celebrity pampering, pharmaceutical promotions etc. Indeed sometimes we are told on a Friday that on the Monday evening news they will be reporting on a particular topic - hardly news.

As an ex Canberran (or Cambodian as my Merimbula friends call me) I have seen the Parliamentary Press Gallery close up and can attest that their close confinement in Parliament House is almost incestuous with journalists from rival news organisations revving each other up over the latest rumour (probably started by a colleague).

The Mass Media has descended into a mass media hysteria of its own making. For goodness sake - they even interview each other! This akin to placing Dracula in charge of the Blood Bank.

Unfortunately for us, events over recent years have provided a feeding frenzy for journalists. Like most people, I want to know what's happening around the world and at home in times of trouble. But I don't want it laid on ten centimetres thick and topped off with outrageous hyperbole! On some news reports - like the recent floods - we were treated to the same background vision of a car being washed away 4 or 5 times during the report.

It's good to know what's happening - but I feel concerned about the unabated hyperbolic bashing of my ears by people who just want to increase their ratings through creating mass hysteria.

38 Christian Values (2/02/11)

The Reverend Stephen Rigby's comments (MNW - 2 Feb) on my earlier letter "God's Games" fails to address the issues I raised. Rev Rigby states that the mercy shown by God to those who were saved during the floods, conveniently overlooks the fate of those who were less fortunate. Why were these people not shown the same mercy?

In the week between my letter and Stephen Rigby's comment, a letter was published from a fellow Christian, Mr Terence Carpenter of Candelo, suggesting that the floods were evidence of God's wrath. He claimed that, we shouldn't "tangle with the Lord's chosen people" this includes his chosen land and his chosen city. From the tone of Stephen Rigby's letter, I had assumed that the old testament had been excised from the bible. I would encourage Rev Rigby to respond to Mr Carpenter's assertions.

Just to put my own cards on the table - I do not have a "sad" view of God. Indeed I have a strong view that there ain't one - only our individual innate goodness and compassion for others.

Any sadness I have is that these values are often absent among Christians and other religious communities.

39 The Easy Life (30/01/11)

Back in the 1970s I watched a funny BBC sitcom called "The Good Life". The stars, Richard Briers, Felicity Kendal, Penelope Keith and Paul Eddington, all went on to star in their own separate series. The Good Life was about a couple (Briers and Kendal) who elected to become self-sufficient on their own urban block.

As I look around me today thirty five years later, it seems we elected somewhere along the line to adopt The Easy Life. The main characteristics of this life seem to be taking the easy option on almost every issue which confronts us - both as individuals and as a country. Perhaps dumb and dumber might be a better description.

I believe there are essentially four forces which have brought us to this point. Firstly we seem to have fallen for the lure of Americanisation where everything is simple and laid on thickly. Examples of this are the swarm of fast food outlets which compete with each other to the point where they are now practically clones of each other. Of course we also have the USA to thank for the mindless, fatuous, facile sitcoms which blare out from every TV channel. One particular low cost US variant, the "Reality Show" has infected Australian TV with our own variants of their pernicious fake reality.

The second factor flows from the first. Advertising aimed at anyone between the age of 2 and 92 seeks to persuade us to buy things we don't need and lots of it.

Thirdly, parents have abdicated the arena. This is probably of greatest concern. The parents have succumbed to US culture and advertising and have wrapped themselves in a cocoon of irresponsibility.

Finally, politicians have contributed to our malaise. Using the well-known tactic of "First simplify - then exaggerate" fake alarm and concern and disrespect for politicians is cultivated. Well done Mr Abbott and others. Of course this would not be possible without the aiding and abetting of a supine media.

So what are we left with? A population that is slothful, selfish, greedy, uncaring, unhealthy, illiterate, ignorant and dumb.

Time to wake up to ourselves perhaps?

40 Reverse evolution (23/01/11)

I have lamented before about our headlong rush towards illiteracy. First the computer keyboard (yes I am using one now) has led to a decline in the quality and legibility of our handwriting. Second, the victory of emails over letter-writing has removed all the etiquette associated with more formal methods of communication. Third, the rise of texting has even dumbed down any vestiges of email etiquette - through abbreviation and the junking of grammar.

Amazingly though as the decline in our literacy gathered pace - our desire self expression grew exponentially - Facebook and YouTube being just two of many examples. However there is a difference between self-expression ("look at me") and communication which results in an exchange of information.

The most devastating impact however is not in the decline of handwriting, nor the trashing of grammar nor even abbreviated self-expression. The saddest victim is our ability to just talk with each other. The impact of email, text and social networking has claimed conversation as the most problematic victim. Now instead of observing eye-to-eye voice communications I hear only the occasional grunt and the use of multi-purpose

meaningless words such as "random" or "whatever". I believe this marks a turning point in our evolution which has always been characterised by the power to communicate.

But hey, let's look at the glass half-full! By the end of this century our reverse evolution might have reached the point where we can have a satisfactory conversation with our ape forebears!

41 God's Games (14/01/11)

Given all that has happened to Australia in recent years, can we still call it "God's own country"? As a nation, we must have been very naughty to have so incurred God's wrath.

Looking back over the last ten years, we have had the worst drought on record, the land parched and cracked. This has been accompanied by extreme periods of heat which in turn has brought a series of record-breaking bushfires wreaking havoc on communities around Australia. Then of course the rains arrived – only a matter of months ago – and we all breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately the rains just kept on coming, eventually wrecking anticipated bumper crops and causing problems for crops and animals alike. As farmers rushed to try to harvest whatever crops were salvageable, the locusts arrived in huge numbers. Unbelievably, the rains not only continued but they became heavier and more widespread causing inland rivers to flood. Eventually the dams filled leading to increased inundation from dam overflows. And now we have the incomprehensible situation where most of Queensland has flooded along with wide tracts of NSW Victoria and now Tasmania and South Australia.

Before the trauma of recovery gets underway we also have the prospect of hundreds of snakes and other dangerous wildlife finding refuge in flooded homes. The rivers have run red with the red earth from the Darling Downs. If Australia were Egypt, I guess we could expect a plague of frogs next.

Meantime nations and religions who all believe in the same God – Jews, Muslims and Christians – are generally beating the crap out of each other – in God's name.

The final touches are provided by famine and starvation in Africa and other nations. Asylum seekers, climate change, increases in urban violence, drug and alcohol abuse complete the picture. In Australia we are becoming more xenophobic, homophobic, bigoted, racist, cynical, greedy and selfish.

So I guess the question is – is God paying us back for our sins? Or has he gone to sleep on the job? Or was he never there in the first place?

42 Most peculiar momma (7/11/10)

Unemployment in Australia is the lowest for decades and the envy of the world. Interest rates are lower than in the last months of the Howard Government. Inflation is within the RBA's acceptable range. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is growing at a healthy 3+%. The mining sector is booming. The GFC has been held at bay. The Australian dollar is strong leading to cheaper imports, cheaper international travel and attracting investment into the country. The drought has broken. The farm sector is booming with bumper wheat harvests and high prices for livestock.

Australia is the envy of the world.

Why then is it that the better things get, the more churlish, selfish, xenophobic and intolerant we become?

43 The government we deserve (3/08/10)

It's a truism to say that we get the government we deserve. Nevertheless we will all whinge later and say that it wasn't our fault that so and so got elected. Watching the current election campaign unfold, and after being away for a couple of months, several factors stand out for me.

Firstly, the campaign is a media event rather than a policy battleground. As the media have gained more power, paradoxically they have become more indolent. It is easier to focus on today's gaff rather than the detail of a policy. Media interviews seem to be a competitive event designed to get through the politician's armour, and to wound him/her. On television and radio we have seen the emergence of a facilitated gladiatorial event where spokespeople from either side are allowed to interrupt, sledge and trivialise the points being made by the other contestant. There are now very few "reporters" of news. Every so-called journalist has to put their own interpretation on events rather than telling us the facts. It is the media which invented the term "spin" to use against the newsmakers, but it is journalists themselves who are now the best spinners (some might say chuckers or even body-line bowlers).

The second factor in the new election environment are voters. What is happening in Australia is a combination of the tall poppy syndrome, greed, selfishness, fear, xenophobia and, yes the influence on voters of the indolent media. As a nation we are getting fat, lazy and looking to hit out at someone to provide an outlet for our frustration. This, combined with the soft and sloppy junk media diet we are forced to consume has resulted in a dumbing down of voters. We now remember the last soundbite we found reassuring and parrot this in any political debate with mates. We ignore what has happened in the immediate past - saying "OK but what are you going to do next?"

However, as we get dumber, something strange seems to be happening. We are also getting hard-edged and brittle, especially on issues affecting the fortunes of other people. We become braver in our xenophobia. Our dark underbelly no longer has to be hidden. Again this is stirred and served up by the indolent media. This dumbing down is also the fault of our politicians who see the power of the media as a way to dilute and sweeten their policy statements.

To me, all this suggests that election campaigns have now become yet another reality TV show - shallow, superficial, staged, mock reality. Like Big Brother, Idol, dance shows, cooking shows, the election is now a series of imitation reality episodes, all carefully stage managed even including the emotional moments. The fact that the Leaders' TV debate had to be moved to avoid clashing with MasterChef is testament to how the media and the voters regard the politicians. Today, Julia Gillard promised to show us the "real me". Again this smacks of those salacious, voyeuristic all night episodes of Big Brother. We have already seen the "real me" of Tony Abbott - not a pretty sight!

I now find myself shunning newspapers and TV public affairs programs to avoid increasing my frustration. Given Kevin Rudd's demise, the ALP has shown itself to be as indolent as the media. It hardly matters who wins the election now - we will certainly get the government we deserve.

44 Christian backlash? (27/08/10)

Lame duck Senator Steven Fielding from the Family First Party is threatening to block legislation put before the Senate by a minority Labor Government.

This takes us into Lewis Carrol territory! Fielding represents a right wing Christian viewpoint. The voters voted to get rid of him at the federal election. However he will hold

his Senate seat until 30 June 2011 under the arcane rules of the Senate. So whilst he holds his seat in a lame duck fashion, he will thwart the wishes of the people who voted against him!

An even juicier conspiracy theory might be that he is intent of punishing the Gillard Government because she is an atheist whereas Abbott is Christian - or at least Catholic. I have heard that Gillard's lack of belief may have been an electoral turn-off - almost the equivalent of her gender, hair colour and country of birth!

OK, let's apply the Jesus test. If we asked Jesus to vote on a preferential basis between Steve Fielding, Bob Brown, Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard I wonder what the outcome would be?!

45 Bipolar Nation (23/08/10)

So there we have it - an election showing how divided the nation is. Now the wheelers and dealers head for dark corners to negotiate which of the independents and minor parties will support the establishment of the new government. All this of course will happen without us mug voters having any say in these discussions - just the faceless men (of both sides) this time. Isn't it ironic that the balance of power will rest with the three independent agrarian socialists and the Greens. Who woulda thunk it - we sure will get the government we deserve! At least the good burghers of Eden-Monaro were sensible enough to keep Mike Kelly in office.

46 What has happened to Australia? (10/08/10)

I was overseas when Kevin Rudd was deposed and I'm still mystified by what happened to him. What was Rudd's crime? Had he mismanaged the economy? Was he corrupt? Had he failed on policy grounds? Nope.

On the contrary. He saved Australia from the worst global meltdown in 70 years through carefully crafted, staged and targeted fiscal stimulus policies. The Opposition opposed all these measures whilst celebrating the projects in their own local electorates.

So, where did he go wrong? He stood up to the Opposition - 4 different leaders in under 3 years. He invested in education, including a building program as part of the fiscal stimulus. He reformed the health system. He tried to take action on climate change but a treacherous Senate prevented this. He played an important role in international affairs.

He treated an indolent media with respect - an error of judgement. He stood up to the shrill and misleading voices of powerful interest groups like the mining industry.

He was a leader and took its responsibility on his own shoulders.

He withstood every enemy except the one within - the faceless faction bosses of the ALP. There we have it - he was shot in the back by them. However they also shot themselves in the foot.

I don't want an Abbott government. I don't want a Gillard government. I want a Rudd government. If this cannot be, then this rusted on labor supporter will be voting Green this time around.

47 An unpalatable reality (12/02/10)

Today, we were told by Joe Hockey that Barnaby Joyce and Tony Abbott are "real" whereas Lindsay Tanner and Kevin Rudd are not "real". If Barnaby Joyce is "real" then my worst nightmare has come true. A lobster-hued apoplectic politician whose mouth

seems to work without the benefit of a brain has been appearing in my dreams. Now he's even there when I'm awake.

48 EOY Brickbat (20/12/09)

It would be nice to end the year on a positive note - nice but not possible Mr Fawly.

Terms which describe the source of my current grumpiness are - oafish, petulant, childish, boorish, cheating, arrogant, bad-tempered, selfish and narcissistic.

Regular readers will be surprised to discover that I am not painting a word picture of politicians of any hue (although many might fit the bill).

No I refer to the Australian cricket team and its on-field antics. I wonder who the sledging coach is?!

49 Back to the future (8/11/09)

All good burghers of Merimbula will no doubt be familiar with the Large Hadron Collider built in a 27 Kilometre underground loop beneath Switzerland and France - crossing the border four times.

The purpose of the atom smashing experiment is to either demonstrate or rule out the existence of the elusive Higgs boson also known as the "God" particle. Fears have been expressed that the Collider might create a black hole - with unknown consequences. Others have postulated that, if successful, the Collider could provide the impetus for time travel. Interestingly, if this were true it is said that time travellers could only ever come back to the moment when the technology was proven possible.

Two weeks ago, following the failure of the Collider to operate last year in pre work up trials due to overheating - two eminent scientists have suggested that the experiment is being sabotaged from the future to save us from ourselves!

Personally - looking around town - I think the people from the future are already here - either that or I was abducted for a few decades!

50 When the boat comes in (25/10/09)

I arrived in Australia by boat in 1960 at a cost of 10 Pounds. I was a pommie migrant. We lived in migrant hostels, not much different from today's detention centres.

Apparently it costs today's boat people around \$15000 each for a place on an overcrowded leaky boat. They claim to be fleeing oppression and wish to seek refuge in Australia. Like the pommie migrant, they have no idea where they will end up.

However the largest group of "illegals" arrive by air on valid visas as tourists or on temporary work permits. They become illegal when their visas expire by which time they have melted into the community. There are around 50,000 in this category.

The Opposition claims that the Rudd Government has gone soft on refugees and that this has resulted in increasing numbers of asylum seekers.

However, it seems to me that the continual shouting by the Coalition that our system is soft is doing a far better job of broadcasting this news to would-be refugees!

If we are determined to stop the inflow, then root cause analysis needs to be undertaken rather than simply stopping them on our or someone else's doorstep.

The Government and Opposition are engaged in a chest beating hairy arsed exercise designed to stop the "flood" of boat people. However, I feel that the Australian community has more compassion in their hearts than is imagined by our political leaders.

Let's face it - no one gets to choose where they are born - nor do they get to choose their ethnicity. For many, the miracle of life is displaced by the misery of existence. Imagine if you were a refugee - what would you think of Australia's attitude?

51 Why is a raven like a writing desk? (15/10/09)

This was the riddle posed by the Mad Hatter to Alice. When Alice gave up - the Mad Hatter admitted he didn't have a clue either.

This has a familiar ring to it!

We now have a political party which has:

- given its coalition colleague the green light to negotiate amendments to the ETS Bill,
- says it may vote in favour of amendments that support the bush - but;
- has also said - in the same breath - that it will vote against the Bill as a whole because they don't want anything to do with this new "tax"!

Aficionados of Lewis Carroll - and surely this must include all National Party politicians - will also recall that time had halted for Hatter, perpetually at 6 pm - it doesn't say what century - but presumably the 19th century.

When Alice arrives at the tea party, the Mad Hatter is characterised by switching places on the table at any given time, making (along with the March Hare) somewhat short, personal remarks, asking unanswerable riddles and reciting nonsensical poetry, all of which eventually drive Alice away.

Can you see where I'm going?

The National Party was once called the County Party, in Queensland it is now part of the LNP - surely one more name change is acceptable?

52 We have seen the enemy ... (6/10/09)

A retired ALP politician once told me of his first day in federal parliament. Labor were in power and as he sat in the chamber - he said to a colleague sitting next to him "Ah, at last I can see the enemy". His colleague replied "No mate, that's the Opposition. The enemy are sitting behind you!"

Malcolm Turnbull must be experiencing a strong sense of this at the moment as his coalition colleagues go about their job of white anting his leadership.

As the German Chancellor discovered 65 years ago, fighting on two fronts is one front too many.

Turnbull must be thinking of the comic strip character Pogo who famously said "We have seen the enemy and the enemy is us"

Time to dust off his application to join the ALP?

53 ESL (25/09/09)

China now has the largest English speaking population in the world - whilst in countries like Australia English is becoming a second language - even to English-speakers!

First our handwriting has declined due our constant use of the keyboard rather than the pen.

Second, as a consequence of email, text and other forms of "social networking", we have sacrificed punctuation and grammar in favour of the slang and abbreviation generated by these new forms of "communication".

Somewhere along the track our vocabulary seems to have shrunk to words such as "stuff", "random" and "gay".

Our person-to-person conversation has fallen foul of the same influences - just listen to people around you talking to each other.

Whilst communication has expanded exponentially - it has in the process become vacuous and meaningless.

However, because reading has been a further casualty, I don't really expect many people to read this letter!

54 Phantom Gardener (20/09/09)

Several years ago - I came across the work of the phantom gardener of Collins Street. My wife and I, back from an overseas holiday, saw a dead possum on the ground. We looked up and saw a dead eucalypt towering high above us. Neatly drilled around the trunk according to the Roundup manufacturer's instructions to poison the tree. We looked around the garden and found three other large trees also poisoned.

It cost us around \$3000 to have the trees removed - and presumably to effect the results sought by the phantom gardener.

I have now returned from 6 weeks in Queensland only to find a phantom gardener (the original or a new one) has kindly pruned a large wattle bush back to a 2 metre high stump. As in the first instance, no communication before or after the pruning.

I'd be interested to know if others have come across the phantom gardener. I have another tree I would like him/her to prune - but can't afford to go away again. The phantom only seems to operate when the coast is clear.

55 Used Car Senators (21/06/09)

I watched Senator Abetz grill the unfortunate Treasury official over alleged assistance provided to the used car dealer John Grant by the PM & Treasurer. How appropriate the coalition have someone like Abetz who clearly has such an affinity with the used car trade.

56 The Person in the room (18/06/09)

"Elephant in the room" is an idiom for an obvious truth that is being ignored or goes unaddressed. People in the room who pretend the elephant is not there might be concerning themselves with relatively small and even irrelevant matters, compared to the looming big one.

Well, what about "the person in the room"?

Since life appeared on earth, many diverse species have risen and fallen. This cycle of life is based on factors such as:

- Calamities such as asteroid collision or major natural disasters;
- Hunted to extinction by other animals; and
- Over-population linked with diminishing resources to sustain the herd.

In each case – the species becomes extinct or continues as a marginalised smaller group 12,000 years ago the earth's population has been estimated to have been around 4 million. When I was born at the end of WWII, it was just over 2 billion. Today we are on the cusp of 7 billion people. In 60 years we have managed to increase earth's population by over 3 times its 1944 level! This growth has been accompanied by massive increases in consumption of the earth's resources.

Now we confront the fact of climate change and diminishing resources caused by our own activities.

So forget about the elephant – we are the problem – and unless we address the issue of overpopulation then we will have ensured our own extinction – maybe sooner than we think.

57 Feeding the Chooks (12/06/09)

Last week Kevin Rudd declared that the Opposition had run up the white flag on debating national issues such as debt and the GFC. Instead, they were trying to link Rudd's use of a 13 yo ute as proof of his indebtedness to a Queensland car dealer.

Now it seems that, like Jo Bjelke Petersen before him, Rudd has now converted the media into being chooks, to be fed by hand when necessary. The media over recent weeks have focused on his in-flight eating habits, his short temper, his ruffled hair and now we are asked to give serious thought as to whether his use of Australian colloquial language is staged – even whether the usage is accurate!

So the Opposition and the media have been suckered into incredibly deep analysis of totally inane issues. Rudd 2 – Opposition and Media 0 I would say.

58 Brownian Motion? (09/06/09)

Is what we are witnessing at Number 10 what scientists call "Brownian Motion"?

59 Whingeing Nation (05/06/09)

Australia has become a nation of whingers. We have caught the British disease and made it our own. The symptoms include petulance, envy, disdain, deprecation, disrespect, greed, boorishness, complaints and wanting everything whilst giving nothing.

A pandemic, it began quietly and unnoticed. Disguised as egalitarianism, fair go, anti authoritarianism, beating the system, punching above our weight internationally all contributed. The acceptance of sledging, the utter disrespect shown to politicians, our selfish boorish behaviour are further signs of the disease.

I blame the **media** through their obsessive need to create an issue instead of reporting the facts. The shock jocks, the tabloid pseudo-columnists, the TV breakfast "personalities", and the evening public affairs commentators are all guilty.

Politicians share responsibility. Our political system is adversarial. How stupid when we are confronted with crises in which all views should be considered.

The appalling attitude of politicians towards each other has rubbed off on the electorate.

The efforts of the media and the politicians are supplemented by our **sports "stars" and media "celebrities"**. We have become a nation of poor winners as well as bad losers. The joy of competing has been replaced by an anger-driven winner-take-all approach accompanied by appalling off-field behaviour.

It is a path which, once taken, is difficult to leave.

The first requirement is to recognise that something is wrong and to diagnose the problem. Then the patient must accept the treatment.

If not - then our whingeing nation will become morally bankrupt.

60 Used Car Salesmen (04/06/09)

In Question Time today, the Opposition was hell bent on trying to implicate the Prime Minister and the Treasurer in a deal to represent the interests of a Queensland Car Dealership in a Treasury scheme to help their industry.

Strangely I reflected then (and during the next debate on health insurance) that the Coalition seem to have many used car salesmen amongst their ranks. They certainly behave as if they are.

61 Political Science (02/06/09)

As an observer of national political debate, I have been struck by its adherence to the laws of the physical universe - in particular Newton's Laws of Motion.

His First Law states that an "object" (in our case an "issue") will move in a straight line until (Second Law) some other force stops or deflects it.

However, his Third Law is particularly pertinent. It postulates that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. *Thus, when two ideas collide, debate goes nowhere and instead generates heat, sparks and loud noise - BUT NO LIGHT!*

One only has to watch five minutes of Question Time to see this Third Law in action.

62 Dickensian rubbish (27/05/09)

If Barnaby Joyce (wasn't that a Dickens' novel?) actually believes the rubbish he spouts, then he needs urgent medical attention. If he doesn't believe it - then he should stop spouting it.

63 The Nappisan approach to immigration (10/05/09)

I share Philip Adams' anger, frustration and sadness at our nation's inability to remove it's underlying racist attitude towards those who seek to come to Australia. I have observed over many years that the last community of migrants to gain access to our society immediately want to slam the door shut and throw away the key to access. This is particularly true of European migrant groups from us Poms onward. I cannot believe that as a nation we are racist and we must urge politicians to act on this basis. If they don't, then we have surrendered to the bile, bias and bigotry slyly used by tabloid journalists, shock jocks and opportunistic politicians.

64 The Nelson Award for One-Eyed Columnists (15/05/09)

Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar, had one arm and one eye. A grateful nation also gave him a column. **Thus he was the first one-eyed columnist in the English-speaking world.**

I reckon it would be a good idea to create a **Nelson Award** to recognise prominent one-eyed columnists of the modern era. It is a vast and fertile field. Some writers, one might call pseudo-journalists, are not only one-eyed - they are also one -armed - if the quality of their writing is any guide.

The criteria for the Nelson Award for the One-Eyed Columnist would include factors such as:

- consistent bias in their interpretation of events;
- an ability to twist the truth and to distort reality;
- a style of writing which combines bile and slyness with self-righteousness;
- blatantly bigoted;
- blatantly racist;
- blatantly one-eyed.

I can think immediately of several wonderful candidates for the Nelson award. Their columns are monuments to their own blindness. What do others think?

If a sponsor can supply the plinth – I could provide the pigeons!

65 Sticks and stones... (10/05/09)

In your "weekend cut and paste" column (WE Aus 9-10 May 2009) I saw that you had given space to your tabloid stablemate pseudo journalist Piers Ackerman. It was a revelation to see him accusing others of attempting to influence public opinion through the repetition of statements. It was a pity he didn't go on to talk about the influence on public opinion of bile, bias and bigotry - issues with which he seems to be well acquainted.

66 Hyperbole – the new "norm" (08/05/09)

As the Swine Flu panicdem (sic) abates, it occurs to me that there is a more dangerously insidious pandemic spreading around the world. I call it a pandemic of hyperbole where every issue is characterised by strident debate. It applies to everything – global financial crisis, Swine Flu, Y2K (remember that?) – even to local issues like hospital politics. Once passed, we hunger for the next bout of bad news.

Just as we older people claim that the 60s are the new 40s, so it seems to me that hyperbole has become the new norm.

An ancient PR hack once told me that the secret to spin is "First simplify – then exaggerate". I would add to this that stridency and hyperbole are inversely proportional to the truth.

There is a constant angry denial of good news (eg lower unemployment) but an insatiable demand for bad news.

Isn't it time we stepped back, put things into perspective and saw things as they truly are?

67 ... end of days? (29/04/09)

Wow! We've had floods, fires, drought, famine, global warming, plagues of locusts, terrorism, the GFC and now Swine Flu. The Egyptians had 10 plagues so I guess we have one to go. The man upstairs is certainly keeping us busy. I've got my eyes on the ground waiting for the frogs to appear

68 Fly Buys (21/04/09)

Bill Leak's cartoon in last weekend's Australian said it all. It apparently costs around \$10,000 for a place on a leaky unsafe asylum seeker boat. The airfare for a holiday with legitimate visa to visit Australia is about \$800.

In June 2005 (last Immigration statistics available) there were 47,800 overstayers in the Australian community, most of whom had arrived on legitimate visas and failed to depart as required. More than 95% of asylum seekers arrive by air.

The largest number of overstayers were British. But that's OK isn't it?

69 Toby Mug (20/04/09)

Seeing the increasingly stentorian statements by Mr Turnbull, I am contemplating using him as a model for a Toby Jug. Of course, the Australian version would be a Mug.

70 Right wing feeding frenzy (17/04/09)

Thank goodness there were no members of the coalition or the rabid right pseudo-journalists lurking around in the waters at Ashmore Reef, They are managing to indulge in a feeding frenzy without even being in the water.

Turnbull's feigned concern, unmasked with terms such as "illegal immigrants", "pernicious trade", "the government is a soft touch", and capped off with his offer to sit down with Mr Rudd to discuss a "harder line approach" on refugees arriving by boat shows his true colours.

Then the emergence of yesterday's hard men - Ruddock, Andrew, Downer - to add berley to the water provides an odd and despicable sense of déjà vu about our recent past.

Howard must be chuckling deep in his Chesterfield sofa.

What a frightened bigoted group of has-beens they are.

71 Blocking Supply (06/04/09)

A few weeks ago, Messrs Turnbull and Hockey were referring to the Rudd Government as being "Whitlamesque". Today they are threatening to block supply in the May Budget. Does this make them "Fraseresque"?

Shame Turnbull! Shame!

72 Overseas Australian Soccer Team (05/04/09)

Here's an idea for the Australian Soccer federation. Why not get Chairman Frank Lowy to buy an English Premier League Soccer team (why not, everyone else is doing it), let's say Portsmouth, and then populate it with Australia's top soccer players. He can do this through purchases from other UK and European clubs as well as providing a tunnel for players in Australia. So we end up with the Australian international soccer team playing

English Premier League. International competition, constant team building. Gee what an idea - wish I'd thought of it myself.

73 Carbon emissions (03/04/09)

The recent 60 minutes of darkness, advertised widely on floodlit hoardings, hardly did anything for the environment and may indeed have left people feeling that they had now done their bit to cut carbon emissions!

I have an alternative idea. The human lungs have a capacity of around 6 litres. We breathe around 20 times per minute. That amounts to about 7,200 litres each hour - or 63,072,000 litres every year **per person**. Now I don't know how many tonnes of CO2 equate to 63 million litres of the stuff, but I bet it's a few jumbo loads.

Now, there are around 8 billion people in the world (see where I'm going?). My calculator tells me this gives a annual value of expired CO2 each year of 5.045763+16. In my language that turns out to be 504,576,000,000,000,000 litres!

So, here's my proposal. Why don't we all stop breathing for an hour each year! That would reduce emissions by huge amounts and could even have longer term benefits for the earth!

74 On yer bikes (31/03/09)

The headlong rush to make "outlawed" motor cycle gangs illegal (isn't that a tautology?) is another idea doomed to failure. Where are the jails that will house these gangs when they flout the law by meeting together? Once they are in jail, how will they be prevented from meeting each other? Indeed, won't association there be compulsory? Will they have separate jails for different gangs - or will gangs be allowed to cross pollinate or brawl within the jails? What will be the effect on other jail inmates? Will they be inducted into the gangs? Will the inmates teach bikers new tricks to bring out into the community as their sentences end? Will alliances, mergers or acquisitions occur making the gangs stronger? How will they interact with other race-based or racist outlaws already incarcerated?

Why not consider other alternatives. For instance, stick them all in the Army and send them off to Afghanistan where they can ply their two trades of drug trafficking and fighting. This will get them off our streets and roads and will be welcomed by the community.

If that's too farfetched, then why not create some new NRL teams - Bandidos, Angels, Commancheros etc etc etc - their names sit well against the Raiders, Broncos, Titans, Dogs. Maybe the Bunnies and Feather Dusters would have to be renamed to keep up appearances. People would pay to watch them beat the crap out of each other each week - although rugby league might be a step up in violence! This would also keep the existing prison population safe from them!

By jailing them all we are creating even greater problems in the future.

75 Pseudo journalists (29/03/09)

Every Sunday morning my weekend reflections are disturbed if I happen to turn on the ABC's "Insiders" when either Piers Ackerman or Andrew Bolt (thank goodness they're never on together) occupy the loony right chair on the set.

Their bloated, bumptious, bilious bullshit knows no bounds. They are a noxious species of pseudo journalist whose only desire is to create conspiracies where none exist,

destroy the reputations of their hated lefty enemies and prepare the way for their born-to-rule right wings mates.

Like cane toads they spread their bile and proudly expose their warts as they croak their crap. Even serious conservatives are beginning to be embarrassed by the shock jock/pseudo journalist attempts to influence public opinion.

However, rather than get them off the TV and out of their tabloid pages, let them sprout their rubbish. The Australian public isn't so gullible as they would like to think and their rantings often clarify why their side of politics is so bereft of ideas or morals.

76 Glass houses (27/03/09)

Oh dear, Mr Turnbull has turned on the lights in the glass house in his attack on Mr Fitzgibbon's personal life.

One hopes all the pollied in the glass house, including him, are suitably attired.

77 Toxic Labelling (24/03/09)

Some schemes are doomed to failure before they even commence. The current proposal to scrape all the "toxic assets" off the boots of the recalcitrant banks and put them into a "bad bank" for warehousing and subsequent sale is a (sub)prime example.

Why would anyone in their right mind be beguiled into buying a "toxic asset"? It seems to me to be akin to selling food which has passed its use by date, or scavenging at the local tip.

Labels in life are very important - I'm researching a book on the subject. Merely calling these assets "toxic" will ensure the failure of the enterprise.

78 I still call 60 Minutes home (22/03/09)

Great Aussie journalism on 60 Minutes tonight covering the Pacific Brands tragedy: "Aussie Aussie Aussie - just doesn't have the same meaning anymore"!

Oh dear - where have the professional journalists gone?

79 Fielding First? (20/03/09)

I just heard Senator Fielding using the term "double disillusionment" during the Senate debate last night.

Was he referring to himself?

80 Faecal Shores? (03/03/09)

The recent spate of shark attacks is unlikely to be an indication of increasing shark numbers given that most species are on the endangered list due to over-fishing.

No I think other environmental factors are at work. When I first swam at Sydney's eastern suburb beaches in the 1960s - most were regularly polluted due to untreated human effluent being pumped into the ocean off South Head.

It got to the stage where I told people I no longer swam at Bondi as I simply found myself going through the motions!. This gave rise to terms such as Bondi Cigars and Blind Mullett being adopted into the vernacular.

Now of course, the beaches are pretty clear and nicer for us, and the sharks, to swim in.

Perhaps Robert Hughes book would have been better titled "Faecal Shores"?

Of course there would be a west coast version called "Foetal Shores" - but that's a story for another day.

81 Tear Jerks (09/02/09)

As our nation suffers from one catastrophe after another, it is disheartening to see the television media going beyond what is reasonable and capitalising on people's suffering. I am forced to assume that this is a deliberate plan to gather ratings and thereby increase their advertising revenue.

This morning it was the Prime Minister's turn. During a long, live interview by a "personality" called Karl on the Channel 9 Today show, the questions, slowly but inexorably, moved from the practical to the personal. Like a bull-fighter poised for the kill, using terms like "lost loved ones" the interviewer finally got under the PM's guard causing him to choke up before he could regain control of himself.

Having achieved his aim, the interview was quickly terminated. Within minutes the next "News Headlines" lead off with a report on the PM being brought to tears over the tragedy. Well done Mr Karl personality - I hope you were proud. I'll bet the station was even prouder. Ratings up, revenues up - what it's all about eh?

82 Cricket? (06/02/09)

Since Australia lost the test series in India, our national side seems to have gone into hibernation.

First we had the KFC team lose the 20:20 series against South Africa, then we had the Commonwealth Bank team lose the one day series against South Africa. Now we are watching the Commonwealth Bank team losing to New Zealand.

I know they were playing South Africa and New Zealand because they had their country's names on their shirts.

What has happened to the Australian team?

83 CACTUS (06/02/09)

I heard on the radio this morning that the ill-fated flight from La Guardia which landed safely in the Hudson River had been allocated the call-sign CACTUS 1539.

Is this evidence that air traffic controllers do have a sense of humour?

84 Money Lenders and the Temple (06/02/09)

As a Buddhist, I sometimes reflect on what action Jesus might have taken in modern day circumstances.

The current GFC (Global Financial Crisis) is a case in point. What Jesus would have done is obvious. Why? Because he did it!

When Jesus arrived at the Temple with the mass of pilgrims, He overturned the tables and called it a den of thieves and a house of merchandise. (Matthew 21:12)

The Temple was in some sense the national bank. It was a great public treasury with vaults containing immense stores of private wealth. These deposits never sat idle, but were loaned at high rates of interest. Sounds familiar doesn't it?!

Although Jesus wasn't himself a Christian (Palestinian Jew?) – his action does set an example for our Christian leaders today.

85 The Global Financial Crisis (05/02/09)

Today I read Kevin Rudd's article "The Global Financial Crisis" published in the February edition of "The Monthly".

The fact that Mr Rudd took time during the Christmas break – albeit with the assistance of "...staff, advisors and other with a common interest in the ideological origins of the current crisis", made me feel grateful and lucky to have a person as Prime Minister who has given the issue deep thought as well as a rapid response.

Parts of his paper are difficult for me to understand, but I came away with a feeling that he knows what is going on.

The federal opposition on the other hand seem incapable of anything except to oppose. They use shameful references to the past, besmirching Mr Whitlam, Rex Connor and Khemlani. Most front bench coalition spokespeople would have been in Primary School when the events they attempt to dredge up actually happened. Worse, they have nothing to contribute to the solution of a real crisis brought on by an ideology which allows the market to rip then requires the Government to bail it out. This is the system preferred by the Coalition. They will rot in opposition for a generation on the basis of their current attitude and "response".

86 Interest rates (05/11/07)

Let's keep interest rate increases in perspective. The RBA rates peaked at 22% under Jim Cairns, **21% under John Howard (1982)**, 19% under Keating before falling to 8% and have bobbed around 5-6% under Costello.

The PM's selective use of history, now followed by making a virtue out of necessity is staggering.

87 Through the eye of the beholder (18/09/07)

Wikipedia describes Blackwater USA as a private military company and security firm founded in 1997 by Erik Prince and Al Clark. It is based in the U.S. state of North Carolina where it operates a tactical training facility which it claims is the world's largest. The company trains more than 40,000 people a year, from all the military services and a variety of other agencies. The company markets itself as being "The most comprehensive professional military, law enforcement, security, peacekeeping, and stability operations company in the world". At least 90% of its revenue comes from government contracts, two-thirds of which are no-bid contracts. It is a private mercenary army.

It has been expelled from Iraq.

Guantanamo detainees were described by the US Government as **alien unlawful enemy combatants – what is the difference?**

88 Climate Change (09/09/07)

So, we now have an in-principle agreement to non-binding, aspirational targets. Wow!

89 Equine Inquiry (04/09/07)

I wonder if Justice Callinan's "sweeping powers" come with a carpet, shovel and broom?

90 Horses for Courses (03/09/07)

Has anyone calculated the economic impact of the current influenza epidemic this winter on humans? Where it came from? Who allowed it into the country. What it has meant to people's wages and employment?

Is the answer "neigh"?

91 Christian (non-voting) Brethren (22/08/07)

If today's ABC story is right, then not only has the Christian Brethren sect gained access to the Prime Minister, no mean feat in itself, but is also a group which apparently breaks the law by not voting!

Does Mr Howard back their non-voting stance?

How about that that for walking both sides of the street!!

92 Nuclear Proliferation (17/08/07)

This week's best jokes.

"India has a good NPT record, other than of course they have nuclear weapons"
Alexander Downer.

"Labor would only supply uranium to some and not to others" John Howard.

What fools!

93 More plebiscites please. (17/08/07)

Why don't we allow plebiscites on lower taxes, more public holidays, politicians pay and allowances?

If we have enough plebiscites, we won't even need the pollies!!

94 Haneef - all is not as it SIMS (20/07/07)

Now we're told that Haneef's SIM card was not in the Jeep Cherokee at Glasgow Airport but 500Kms away in Liverpool in his cousin's mobile.

A very mobile SIM indeed.

Mr Howard said in 1995 ""Truth is absolute, truth is supreme, truth is never disposable in national political life."

Neither it seems is the SIM.

95 Haneef - having a Hicks moment (16/07/07)

What on earth is going on in Australia? Dr Haneef lent his sim card to someone who subsequently may have committed a terrorist act. He has been charged with "recklessly lending his sim card..."!

Law officers have admitted the charge is weak – and so he has been released on bail on surety of \$10,000 and three visits per week to the police.

Mr Andrews now decides that Dr Haneef has failed a character test based on the Minister's view that Haneef "has or has had an association with persons involved in criminal conduct.". He is therefore to have his visa cancelled and to be incarcerated in the Villawood detention centre. .

So – how many Australians – including politicians – have lent their sim cards (I recall at least one Minister) to others, recklessly or otherwise and who have also associated with people involved in criminal conduct (many would fall into this category).

Come on Mr Andrew, what about "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone"?

96 A funny thing happened ... (11/07/07)

I see President Bush is holding off any decision regarding withdrawal from Iraq until "General Petraeus returns to the US in September" and reports to the Congress.

I have mental view of legions of Roman soldiers returning to Rome carrying banners and motifs, lead by their General (Petraeus) who is to report to Caesar.

Unfortunately Caesar didn't have a mobile phone or satellite communications to help him – otherwise I doubt he would have waited 3 months for reports from his Generals.

97 A deserving recognition (04/04/07)

I nominate Major Michael Mori as the next Australian of the Year.

98 October whirlwind (29/03/07)

What a strange (but predictable) response from the conservatives without conscience to the Hicks guilty plea! Especially the News Ltd "journalists".

They're hoping we'll all forgive & forget. Well we can forgive but we'll never forget.

Those responsible for this injustice will reap a whirlwind later in the year.

99 Et tu Brute? (20/03/07)

Friends, Romans & Countrymen – lend me your ears.

The PM needs them!

100 Who's conning who? (16/03/07)

Can someone please explain to me the difference between cons, ex-cons and neo-cons? There seems to be a lot of it about.

101 Is Downer on Uppers? (03/03/07)

So, Mr Downer believes that David Hicks' treatment at the hands of the US Military demonstrates the esteem held by the US Government of Australia!

What is this guy on?

102 Cheney - straight shooter (26/02/07)

Did I read on the weekend that Greg Sheridan described Cheney as a straight shooter?

That's not what Harry Whittington would say!

103 Liberal Slogans (20/02/07)

1975 Liberal Party election slogan – "Turn on the lights"
2007 Liberal Party slogan (courtesy Turnbull) – "Turn off the lights"
Last week's Liberal Party buzz phrase – "Walking down both sides of the street"
Labor Party response – "These boots'r'made for walkin..."

104 Conservatives without a conscience (18/02/07)

Last week I was reading an account by an ex legal Counsel to President Nixon of how "authoritarian conservatives" in the US use a combination of fear, lies, smear campaigns and character assassination coupled with a misuse of executive power, control over the conservative media, bypassing the US Congress, avoidance of financial scrutiny and the rewriting of history to attack anyone and anything remotely associated with liberal ideas and thought.

He calls them conservatives without conscience.

Most of them are "Christians".

Wouldn't it be terrible if Australia went down that path?

105 Premature Evacuation (15/02/07)

It seems that Messrs Howard & Downer are suffering from that embarrassing male condition of premature evacuation.

106 H(ow)ard of Hearing? (12/02/07)

Perhaps the Prime Minister had another hearing lapse and thought the Democrats were set to nominate Osama not Obama as a Presidential Candidate?

107 The Hicks Muzzle (05/02/07)

Mr Ruddock, having swept David Hicks under the carpet, now says it is best that people do not comment publicly on the case!

He has apparently said "We would expect that in Australia, we don't (sic) expect that people would be out there arguing in relation to a person who has been charged with offences about the appropriateness of it, we believe the court and in this case the tribunal ought now to get on with its job."

What utter hypocrisy suggesting that a Military Commission, not yet established, possibly illegal and outside the ambit of Australian Law should be left to do its dirty work unchallenged.

The Government, having washed their hands of an embarrassing problem, now wants to muzzle other Australian citizens to prevent them even discussing the matter. George Orwell was only half right!